De Staten van Holland en de Opstand. De ontwikkeling van hun functies en organisatie in de periode 1544-1588.
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Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
1990

Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database

Citation for published version (APA):

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Download date: 20-07-2019
SUMMARY

July 19, 1572 is a remarkable day in the history of the States of Holland. Without permission from the governing authorities some nobles and a number of delegates from twelve towns gathered in Dordrecht. Moreover, they neglected a summons to appear in The Hague issued by the legal stadholder Bossu, the deputy of the Habsburg monarch Philip II. The Hague was the place where the States would normally meet. William of Orange, who had fled in 1567 on account of the arrival of the new governor-general, the Duke of Alva, was proclaimed stadholder once again by the rebels. William was charged to take over the government for as long as the States would revolt. That lasted longer than the States of Holland had expected. In earlier times the Habsburg sovereigns had managed to suppress most of the resistance of the representative institutions in their territories, but during the Dutch Revolt they failed to do so. Besides the States of Holland, a number of other Dutch provincial estates took over dominion in the same decade as well. Together, they were to constitute a republic for some centuries, because they were unable to find a suitable successor to Philip II.

The purpose of this study is to describe and to compare how the States of Holland functioned before and after the outbreak of the Revolt in 1572. Institutional differences in their structure, position, functions and organisation before and after July 19 have been examined, as well as continuity of the individuals involved. The questions dealt with here fit within the tradition of extensive research into the connections between rulers and their subjects. The results are to contribute to our knowledge of representative institutions in early modern times. Theories presented by historians as Hintze, Blockmans, Königsberger and Krüger have provided more in-depth knowledge and insight and stimulated an attempt at precision in the formulation of questions.

The years 1544-1588 frame the period for which research has been done in this study. Since the States of Holland had already been granted new and wide powers in the field of taxation during the reign of Charles V (1515-1555), it proved to be important to concentrate on a longer introductory period. As a result of their extension of powers, their status and organisation had already changed before 1572. 1544 has been taken as a starting point because, in that year, the States appointed a new advocate (landsadvocaat) — their most important official —, who chronicled the resolutions more elaborately than his predecessor. Thus, a relatively firm basis for these investigations has been provided. The end point of this study is 1588. That year, in which the English governor-general Leicester leaves Holland, can be seen as the beginning of a new era.

This study is based on investigations into the resolutions of the States of Holland (cf. Appendix 3), data from the archives of the States of Holland and the landsadvocaten, and, to a limited degree, material from the archives of the sovereign institutions, the Ridderschap (a board of nobles) and the twelve towns with voting rights.

The first chapter deals with the changes in structure and with the continuity in the delegations that were sent to the meetings of the States of Holland circa 1572. Only the nobility and the most important towns were represented in the States of Holland. The first vote was given by the nobles. They also represented the rural districts. Before 1572, six towns had managed to obtain one vote each, viz. Dordrecht, Haarlem, Delft, Leiden, Amsterdam and Gouda. During the first years of the Revolt, delegates from a number of smaller Dutch towns began to appear regularly at the meetings. In contrast, Haarlem, which had been won back by the Spanish troops in 1573, was not represented in the States for some years. This situation was to last until the Pacification of Ghent, a treaty concluded by Holland and Zeeland with a number of other rebellious provinces in 1576. Amsterdam was not present at the first meetings either. The old Roman Catholic authorities sided with the Spanish in 1572, and only in 1578 was their hegemony replaced by that of another group of families.

Of the smaller towns, twelve were permanently represented in the States of Holland, five from the area south of the IJ (the so-called Zuiderkwartier [Southern Quarter]) and seven north of the IJ (the Noorderkwartier [Northern Quarter], also known as West Friesland). The order in which they were to vote was determined in 1579. Some of the towns which in previous years had occasionally sent delegates to the States meetings were now no longer included. For these small towns, the costs of appearing at the meetings, which they had to defray themselves, probably did not pay off. Subsequently, the less important towns were summoned to a meeting — and now and again indeed appeared — only when special items were on the agenda, such
as the election of a new sovereign ruler. Attempts at later times to be admitted to the States were unsuccessful. Requests from The Hague, the unenfranchised town where the meetings took place, were turned down as well by those States’ members who were entitled to vote. They already had their hands full with one another. Moreover, any increase in the number of towns with the right to vote would slow down the decision process even more.

Both before and after 1572, the votes of the six ‘major’ towns carried the most weight. This is evident, among other things, from their share in the work for committees (cf. Appendix 4). Only Rotterdam managed to raise itself to a ‘major’ town after 1572. For some time, the contribution of this town to the organisation of the States was disproportionately large. Of the other towns in the Zuiderkwartier, Gorinchem, Schiedam, and Brielle occupied modest positions and Schoonhoven hardly counted at all. Similar differences in status existed among the towns in the Noorderkwartier. There Alkmaar, Hoorn and Enkhuizen were the most important towns, whereas Medemblik, Edam, Monnickendam and Purmerend had little to say. Those four votes were nevertheless significant in the fight for prestige between this quarter and the rest of Holland. Some divergent regulations applied for the Noorderkwartier; the area kept its own board of Gedeputeerde Raden (deputised councillors), which was formed, because of its isolated position after the fall of Haarlem in 1573.

On the average, one to three nobles were in attendance at the States’ meetings. Before 1572 the delegation of the Ridderschap could expect the same number of people from each separate town at those meetings. Numerically, the nobles were at that time already by far inferior. As a rule, the towns with a newly acquired right to vote sent two delegates at most, but frequently they only sent one. Since they were twelve, the delegates from the towns had increasingly become numerically superior as a result of the Revolt. Consequently, the nobles had to find their status on different factors, for example on the fact that they had been present in the States for a longer period of time than most of the delegates for the towns.

Due to annual changes in magistrature, the turnover of the town delegations would be fairly large. Only a few, some of them pensionaries, were active during a long, continuous period of time. Thus, it is no surprise, that as far as individuals are concerned, there was a considerable difference between those present at meetings of the States before and after the outbreak of the Revolt, even if one does not take into account the increase of delegates as a result of the growing number of towns with a right to vote. In Appendix 1, details can be found about the 300 most important delegates from the period covered by this study, and selected on the basis of the frequency of their attendance at States’ meetings and their work for committees.

In our search for continuity in the delegations, we had to turn to the nobles and the representatives from the ‘major’ towns. As for the towns, it appeared from attendance data that it was only a select group that had been sent to the States’ meetings both before and after July 19, 1572. Some delegates had left Holland in 1568 on account of Alva’s arrival and had returned in 1572. Others reappeared on the political scene only after the Pacification of Ghent. Of the six ‘major’ towns, Gouda sent back most, viz. ten, former delegates to the States’ meetings. Five of them attended the meetings even after the Pacification of Ghent. Amsterdam scored lowest in this respect. Due to a radical change in its ruling authorities in 1578, none of the delegates who represented Amsterdam before 1572 returned to the States’ meetings. There is, however, a certain continuity in the attendance of seven members of the Ridderschap, even though some of them failed to attend the meetings between 1568 and 1572 and between 1572 and 1576. As far as we know, there was only one nobleman who was continuously present during the whole period. But for that matter, the number of nobles active on behalf of the States and definitely siding with the King was only quite small.

In the towns, the dividing line between being in favour of or against the Revolt went straight through families. Sometimes fathers took side with the old rule whereas their sons opted for the States. The choice should not be explained as a matter of differing generations, however. Even so it is true that the old assumption that members of the top rank of the towns returned to the States after 1572 can be confirmed. Only in Amsterdam did the Revolt play into the hands of a certain group of families. Both before and after 1572, members of the high societies of the various towns who would come across each other during States’ meetings were often related to each other. The highest-ranking office-holders in the States were drawn from their midst (cf. Appendix 2). People not born in Holland could work their way to the front by becoming town pensionaries.

Chapter 2 and 5 describe the changing position of the States of Holland. As a result of the Revolt, the Brussels administrative level with its governor-general and his so-called collateral councils — the Council of State, the Council of Finance and the Secret Council — actually disappeared for the inhabitants of Holland. Before 1572, the States of Holland had been very much dependant on Brussels for the protection of their interests. After 1576, however, the governors and representative councillors of the States General never attained the positions which their sovereign predecessors used to have. Nor could, in the beginning period of the Revolt, the government councils, which assisted the Prince of Orange in Holland, be put on
a par with the central collateral councils. Like the stadholder, they derived their authority from the regional States and they were 'instruments' serving to fill the power vacuum caused by the serious conflict with the sovereign ruler. After 1572, that new balance of power applied to the Council of Holland (Hof van Holland) and the Chamber of Accounts as well. Traditionally both of them had been administrative institutions on a provincial level. On account of the flight of the old councils to Utrecht, the States had to reorganise them in 1572.

Since the States of Holland had formally put the government into the hands of the stadholder in 1572 and instituted administrative councils to assist him, they limited the responsibilities of the reinstated Hof van Holland. Before 1572, this institution had exercised sovereign power by order of the ruling monarch and his stadholder, and it had advised the central government about matters concerning Holland. In relation to the Hof, the States were in a subordinate position at that time. In actual practice this was reflected by the States' contacts with the councillors about permissions for meetings, negotiations about subsidies, consultations about proclamations, privileges, legal disputes, and all kinds of other matters, such as appointments and public order. Partly due to the fact that, after the outbreak of the Revolt the stadholder would stay in Holland more often than before, the only tasks remaining for the Hof after 1572 were to give advice and to administer justice.

Ever since the 1550s, the power of the States had been increasing enormously as a result of the fact that the States collected and controlled taxes for ordinary as well as extraordinary subsidies. The ruling sovereign had granted them this power in return for their consent. In this power play between sovereign and the estates, which in 1572 was abruptly terminated, Philip II had made concessions which were very significant for the development of the States of Holland.

Chiefly due to their new fiscal activities, the States came occasionally into conflict with the Hof. The latter was convinced that the States tended more and more to ignore the sovereign authority. The Hof considered their private meetings particularly detrimental to the power of the central government over Holland. According to the States, precisely those meetings were necessary on account of the many subsidies to benefit the sovereign. Although self-interest on the part of the Hof must also be taken into account, since the Clerk suffered income losses because his work for the States had been reduced, the councillors' diagnosis was correct. By assigning privileges as a solution to his great want of money, the sovereign had started an almost irreversible development. By allowing the States to set foot on the terrain of the executive, he had influenced their relations with the sovereign institutions even before 1572. Alva tried to turn the clock back in favour of the sovereign, but as is already known, his success was short-lived.

It is easy to assume that in 1572 the States wanted to keep the Hof's power within bounds, because they were conscious of their bad experiences with this governing body during the preceding decades. However, too little is known about the discussions and the prevailing views of the States during the first months of the war to confirm this. Adaptation of the instruction dating from 1531 would have been likely, if the States had premeditated a new policy. But nothing is known about that. Moreover, nothing has been found which reveals that the States were opposed to the new councillors' involvement with the Revolt during the first years of the crisis. On the contrary, their help was taken for granted. Yet the States did censure the Hof in later years, when the latter made pronouncements on financial matters which the States wanted to deal with themselves without any interference.

The establishment of the Supreme Court (Hoge Raad) as a court of appeal in 1582 has been connected with the States' policy to divide and rule. There are some arguments to make a reasonable case for this theory. Like the Hof, the Supreme Court was given residence in The Hague. From then on the Hof's councillors could have the impression that they were being supervised. Since that time, the States sought the advice of both the Hof and the Supreme Court when important issues were at stake. In other words, the Hof's councillors lost their monopoly position. On the other hand, there is the weighty argument that, before 1572, there was the possibility to take one's case to the Grand Council of Mechlin. Consequently, it is no big surprise that it was precisely when they left the sovereign ruler (1581), that the States called the Supreme Court into being.

Another change in the position of the States of Holland in the 1580s came as a result of the recapture of Brabant and Flanders by the Spanish troops. As a consequence, Holland became the most important province. Its States secured a position, comparable to the one held by Brabant in the States General before 1572. As a matter of fact, in 1585 the States decided to have their meetings in The Hague from then on and the Council of State had its seat there as well.

Their changing position resulted in an extension of responsibilities. The development of this extension is described in chapters 3 and 6. Before 1572, the States were very much concerned with the economic prosperity of Holland. A lot of attention was given to the protection of herring-fishery, trade, money rates
and corn prices. For economic reasons the States also sometimes entered the fields of Foreign Affairs and the Defence. The protection of privileges, one of the States' chief responsibilities, was closely connected with the supervision of government policy. Subsidies for the sovereign and the matters ensuing from them were, however, their prime concern.

In his characterization of late medieval parliaments, Blockmans links up parliaments in urban areas with broad fields of — particularly socio-economic — activities. As regards the States of Holland in the sixteenth century, it appears that there this connection can also be made. For the time of the Revolt, however, such a link need not be made. It is only logical that the States developed an extensive range of activities at that time, since they were together with the stadtholder in power. Initially the Revolt was their main concern, but in the long term financing the war took up most of their attention. They could build on the experiences they had acquired before 1572 as a result of their fiscal responsibilities. In this respect the continuity can be emphasized. On the other hand, there were new responsibilities, such as their concern for the Reformed Church and the University of Leiden.

The States' growing organisation is outlined in chapters 4 and 7. Before 1572, measures were only occasionally taken to improve the originally inadequate administration. This administration was characterized by few formal rules; in actual practice it took shape gradually. The instructions for the landsadvocaten, for example, were enumerations of regulations laid down over the course of years. Nevertheless, as a result of the Revolt, it was necessary to carry out certain reforms. The secretarial duties were taken off the landsadvocaten's shoulders in 1572, when a secretary was appointed. As early as the 1540s, the States had enlisted barristers and attorneys for most of the lawsuits they got involved in. Towards the end of 1573, the frequency of their meetings (cf. Appendix 3) forced them to draw up rules and to institute an executive committee, called since 1581 Gecommitteerde Raden (Delegate Councils). In addition to the district office of the States' tax collector (gemeenlandsontvanger), regional tax collector's offices were set up to settle the collection and payment of money more promptly. In 1572, there was no ideology or mapped out course of action leading to a new structure of the States' organisation, however.

During the Revolt, decision-making was one of the States' major problems. The slowness with which the States settled their affairs was caused by the great number of States' members and by the fact that an increasing number of things were excluded from the procedure of deciding matters by a majority of votes. Every town considered itself sovereign and did not want to be subordinate to the decisions of the majority. As a result it proved to be difficult to find solutions for their disagreements. The absence of a sovereign who was above party made itself painfully felt.

In the first few decades of the Revolt, the States' civil service remained small in number, mainly because funds were lacking. The landsadvocaten and the tax collectors were assisted only by a few clerks, messengers and bailiffs. Both before and after 1572, many things were dealt with in an ad hoc way by the delegates. Messengers, bailiffs and other staff members of the Hof van Holland could also be enlisted to help.

As regards staff, there were some changes around 1572 which were due to the death of the landsadvocaten in 1569, the departure of the States' collector on account of the Revolt, and the institution of a few new offices. However, the new landsadvocaten had taken over the office incidentally before 1572, when he was pensionary of Leiden. The new collector had been employed as a clerk in the service of the ex-collector. The secretary had been a former landsadvocaten's clerk. Moreover, the States' messenger, one of the two barristers, and the attorney working for the Hof remained loyal to their principals, while later on, the other barrister made himself useful as a delegate for Dordrecht. For the new posts, the States had to look round for persons outside the circle of available acquaintances. Some southern Dutch people managed to penetrate as far as the posts of office holders. In the long term, it appeared that collectors were often succeeded by one of their relatives.

All in all the decision of the States of Holland to withdraw themselves from the sovereign's rule resulted in far-reaching consequences for their composition, their position, their responsibilities and their organisation. In the years 1572-1588, many changes cropped up. From then on, the States operated within a political framework which they had only partly created themselves. Certain developments, however, had started before 1572. Comparing the periods before and after 1572, one is inclined to stress the differences and those aspects which emphasize the breach. Especially with respect to the organisation, however, there are many continuous lines. After 1572, the States of Holland did not function completely differently, but evidently they continued, using their working methods of the previous decades and partly some of the same people to build on.